

HEADER TANK WITH INTEGRAL MOUNTING FLANGE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

1. Field of the Invention

5 [0001] The subject invention relates to a one-piece aluminum heat exchanger tank and a method for fabricating such a tank.

2. Description of the Related Art

 [0002] Various heat exchanger tanks exist in the art that are formed from a single sheet of metallic material. These one-piece tanks are typically
10 fabricated by rolling an aluminum-clad sheet into a structure having integrally formed sidewalls and then joining two opposed side edges of the walls together along a common joint. The resulting tank is then connected to a core subassembly using conventional nuts and gasket seals in combination with discrete mounting brackets that must be positioned on the tank before the tank is connected to the core.

15 [0003] An example of a one-piece aluminum tank which utilizes separate mounting brackets for mounting the tank to a radiator core is disclosed in United States Patent No. 6,167,953 ("Kobayashi *et al.*"). The Kobayashi *et al.*, tank features a cylindrical body formed by brazing opposed end edges of an aluminum sheet together to form a joint that extends along the length of the tank. Specifically,
20 one of the end edges of the joint overlaps the other on the exterior surface of the tank.

 [0004] Although forming a single, overlapping joint on the exterior of the Kobayashi *et al.*, tank arguably reduces the number of steps required to fabricate

the tank, it does nothing to minimize the space occupied by the tank once it has been connected to a core subassembly. It also creates a rough, marred exterior surface which is so uneven that it renders the tank unuseable. Furthermore, the process of connecting the tank to the core is complicated by the use of the discrete mounting
5 brackets. Each bracket must be separately brazed to the exterior of the tank before the tank can be attached to the core. Given the recent attention focused on creating an aluminum radiator that eliminates the header crimp area between the core and tanks, the marred surface created by overlapping the mounting brackets and exterior joint of the Kobayashi *et al.*, invention fails to provide a suitable solution for minimizing the
10 space occupied by a one-piece header tank.

[0005] Although Kobayashi *et al.*, and other references specifically disclose aluminum tanks having brazed joints and which are mounted onto cores using separate brackets, the references fail to provide any type of connecting joints that are strong, yet result in a tank having a space-saving and smooth exterior surface.
15 The references also do not disclose a tank featuring such a joint in combination with an integrally-formed bracket or rail for use in connecting the tank to a core.

BRIEF SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION AND ADVANTAGES

[0006] The invention provides a heat exchanger tank formed from a
20 single sheet of clad material. The sheet extends through a rectangular cross-section and defines a tube wall with tube holes extending therethrough. A parallel joint wall is spaced from the tube wall. Spaced parallel sidewalls interconnect the joint and tube

walls to define a chamber and opposed open ends. The joint wall has an integrally formed tab that extends therefrom into the chamber. A first of the sidewalls is disposed in sealing engagement with the outside of the tab to enclose the tab within the chamber.

5 [0007] The subject invention also provides a method of fabricating a heat exchanger tank. The method includes the step of forming a single sheet of material with a cladding on at least one surface thereof to define a tank extending through a rectangular cross-section and having a tube wall, a parallel joint wall spaced from the tube wall, and spaced parallel sidewalls interconnecting the joint and tube
10 walls to define a chamber having opposed open ends. An additional step is forming an integral tab extending from the joint wall into the chamber. A first of the sidewalls is disposed into engagement with the exterior of the tab to enclose the tab within the chamber, and brazing the first sidewall to the tab.

 [0008] Accordingly, the subject invention overcomes the limitations of
15 the related art by providing a one-piece heat exchanger tank specifically designed to minimize the exterior surface area occupied by the tank after it has been installed on a radiator core. This is achieved by providing a smooth exterior surface created by joining the opposed side edges of the tank in a manner that positions the overlapped edges inside the chamber of the tank, and by incorporating an integrally-formed
20 mounting bracket on the tank without jeopardizing the leak integrity of the tank.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE SEVERAL VIEWS OF THE DRAWINGS

[0009] Other advantages of the present invention will be readily appreciated as the same becomes better understood by reference to the following detailed description when considered in connection with the accompanying drawings
5 wherein:

[0010] Figure 1 is a perspective view of a heat exchanger tank according to one embodiment of the present invention and showing end caps;

[0011] Figure 2 is an end view of the tank of Figure 1;

[0012] Figure 3 is an enlarged view of the tank shown in Figure 2
10 illustrating the interior braze joint;

[0013] Figure 4 is a perspective view of a tank according to Figure 1 prior to forming holes, slots or recessed areas on the flange thereof;

[0014] Figure 5 is an exploded end view of the tank of Figure 1 illustrating a method of forming the tank;

15 [0015] Figure 6 is a perspective view of a heat exchanger tank according to an alternative embodiment of the present invention;

[0016] Figure 7 is a perspective view of yet another embodiment of a tank but prior to forming holes, slots or recessed areas on the flange thereof ;

[0017] Figure 8 is an end view of the tank shown in Figure 7; and

20 [0018] Figure 9 is an enlarged view of the tank shown in Figures 6, 7 and 8 illustrating the exterior braze joint.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION OF THE INVENTION

[0019] Referring to the Figures, wherein like numerals indicate like or corresponding parts throughout the several views, a heat exchanger tank for a cooling system is shown generally at 10 in Figure 1, and at 110 in Figure 6. The tank is formed from a single sheet of material having a cladding 12 on at least one surface thereof. The sheet material shown in the Figures is aluminum sheet material with 4000 series braze on the exterior surface thereof. The sheet extends through a rectangular cross-section to define a tube wall 14 and a parallel joint wall 16 spaced therefrom. Spaced parallel sidewalls 18 interconnect the joint wall 16 and tube wall 14 to define a chamber 20 and opposed open ends 22, 24 for permitting fluid flow through the tank 10. The tube wall 14 includes tube holes 25 through which elongate tubes 26 are received. Each of the tubes 26 defines a passage 28 which extends through the tube 26 to permit fluid flow into the chamber 20. End caps 30, 32, are positioned for being sealingly engaged with the open ends 22, 24 of the tank.

[0020] Each tank also includes a tab 34 integrally formed with the joint wall 16. The tab 34 extends into the chamber 20. A first sidewall 36 of the sidewalls 18 is disposed in sealing engagement with the outside of the tab 34 and encloses the tab 34 within the chamber 20. In particular, the first sidewall 36 includes an interior joint surface 38 positioned within the chamber 20. The tab 34 includes an exterior surface 40 with the cladding 12 thereon. The cladding 12 seals the exterior surface 40 into engagement with the joint surface 38 to define an internal braze joint 42 within the chamber 20.

[0021] The first sidewall 36 extends above the joint wall 16 and the tab 34 to define a mounting flange 44. The flange 44 includes a plurality of holes 46 for receiving complementary fasteners therethrough for mounting the tank 10 on the cooling system. The flange 44 has a peripheral edge 48 from which spaced slots 50
5 extend toward the tab 34. Like the holes 46, the slots 50 are used to connect the tank 10 to the cooling system. Recessed areas 52, 54 extend from the peripheral edge 48 toward each of the ends 22, 24 of the tank for positioning the flange 44 in closely-conforming relation to the cooling system.

[0022] A heat exchanger tank according to another embodiment of the
10 invention is shown generally at 110 in Figure 6. With the exception of the flange, the tank 110 includes the same components and is formed from the same materials as the tank 10.

[0023] The flange 44 of the tank 110 is formed from a double thickness of the sheet material to define primary and reinforcing walls 114 and 116.
15 The reinforcing wall 116 overlaps the primary wall 114 on the interior thereof and extends transversely over the joint wall 16 on the exterior thereof. The cladding 12 on the joint wall 16 seals the reinforcing wall 116 into engagement the joint wall 16 to define an exterior braze joint 118. A U-shaped fold 120 integrally joins the reinforcing wall 116 with the primary wall 114.

20 [0024] Other than extending through a double thickness of sheet material rather than a single thickness, the holes 122, slots 124 and recessed areas 126, 128 on the tank 110 are identical to the respective holes 46, slots 50 and recessed

areas 52, 54 of the tank 10. Furthermore, other than extending across the double thickness of the sheet material, the peripheral edge 130 from which the slots 124 extend is identical to the peripheral edge 48 of the tank 10.

[0025] The subject invention also includes a method of fabricating a heat exchanger tank. The method includes the steps of forming a single sheet of material having a cladding 12 on at least one surface thereof to define a tank 10 extending through a rectangular cross-section and having a tube wall 14 with a parallel joint wall 16 spaced from the tube wall 14. Spaced parallel sidewalls 18 interconnect the joint and tube walls 16 and 14 to define a chamber 20 having opposed open ends 22, 24. The joint wall 16 and tube wall 14 are interconnected by forming an integral tab 34 that extends from the joint wall 14 into the chamber 20, and a first sidewall 36 of the sidewalls 18 is disposed into engagement with the exterior of the tab 34 to enclose the tab 34 within the chamber 20. The first sidewall 36 is then brazed to the tab 34.

[0026] The method is further defined as extending the first sidewall 36 upwardly above the joint wall 14 and the tab 34 to project outwardly from the joint wall 14 to define a flange 44. Still another step is extending holes 46 through the flange 44 for receiving fasteners therethrough to mount the tank 10 on the cooling system. Spaced slots 50 are also formed on the flange 44 and extend from a peripheral edge 48 thereof toward the tab 34 for connecting the tank 10 to the cooling system. In addition, the method includes the step of forming a recessed area 52, 54 on

each end of the flange 44 that extends from the peripheral edge 44 thereof toward an adjacent end 22, 24 of the tank 10.

[0027] The method continues in an alternative way by doubling the sheet defining the flange 44 to further define a primary wall 114 and a reinforcing wall 116. The method is further defined by forming a U-shaped fold 120 which integrally joins the primary wall 114 and reinforcing wall 116. The method also includes the step of overlapping the primary wall 114 and the joint wall 16 with the reinforcing wall 116. The reinforcing wall 116 is then brazed to the primary wall 114 and the joint wall 16.

10 [0028] A final step is sealing end caps 30, 32 with the open ends 22, 24 on each of the tanks 10, and 110 .

[0029] Obviously, many modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the teachings set forth above. The invention may be practiced other than as specifically described within the scope of the claims. 15 Furthermore, the foregoing description of the preferred embodiment of the invention and the best mode for practicing the invention are provided for the purpose of illustration only and not for the purpose of limitation -- the invention being defined by the claims.